1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13



(*c*) *In hunting*, deities other than the king's ancestors were invoked, especially *Hũvĩ*, the hunters' god, and *Kuanja*, a goddess, both of which had their own shrines and priests. These may have been connected with the country or with its earlier inhabitants (the kings being recognized as late comers). At the inaugural hunt the offices were assigned. The king's character was supposedly revealed by the sex of the animal killed at this hunt: 'If the duiker[1] is a female, then it is good indeed, but if a male, then the king is a real person but he habitually will become angry to excess' (*Nda ombambi yaco omange ciwa muẽlẽ, puaĩ nda ulume, Soma omunu puaĩ o tema tema enene*).

2. *To represent the nation in its external relations*, i.e. (*a*) *To make agreements with other kings to promote trade*, and (*b*) *To make war on other peoples* in order to provide his court with tribute and his warriors with plunder. The war leader (*Kesongo*) had his own residence and establishment entirely separate from that of the king, whom he must not meet face to face except on certain state occasions. In Bailundu he, with certain other officials, was of the stock of the slaves of the state (*ovinduli viosoma*) who came from Luandu in the Songo country. Each king must inaugurate his reign with a war, during or after which he must ceremonially 'eat the old one' (*oku lia ekongo*)—a feast consisting of the flesh of a specially fattened slave cooked with the flesh of the principal animals commonly eaten.

3. *To dispense justice*. In point of time consumed, this question was very important, for it occupied much of the time of both rulers and ruled. Good evidence of this is in the number of proverbs used at court, second only in number to those used for the education of the young. The king's court (*olusenje*) was the supreme court of the nation where cases were continually heard and 'fines eaten' (*oku lia ovimbu*). Cases might be settled either by ordeal or by decision of the king, and there was therefore room for appeal and re-trial. The king's word, however, was final, as the proverb has it: *O popia onganji, o mãlãpo osoma.* (The advocate speaks, the king finishes [decides].) The king was not generally arbitrary in his decisions but was bound not only by the customs of his people, but also by the desires of his councillors. Among the legitimate kings of the Ovimbundu there were comparatively few of the revolting and wholesale punishments which were so

[1] The duiker, *ombambi* (*Silvicapra grimmii leucoprosopus*).

## EARLY HISTORY

175 The earliest records of native migration in what is now Angola concern the warrior hordes of Jagas (Jaggas, Jakas, Iaggas, Giaghis, Giaki, Ayaka etc.), who from about 1560 onwards were reported in north-western Angola and the adjacent Kingdom of Congo.(1) Various attempts have been made to identify the Jagas. Van Wing(2) and Torday(3) hold that the name is derived from the Bayaka tribe on the middle Kwango; Battell's account would seem to identify them with the Bangala (Imbangala) of Jaga Cassange, who are known to have been invading western Angola at this time. Childs points to suggestive links of the Jagas with Ovimbundu dynasties: e.g. the Ciyaka group of Ovimbundu, who recognise the region of Cassange as the location of their earliest ancestral tombs. He also shows that certain Jaga customs as described by the earlier writers resemble those connected with Ovimbundu kingship. Childs suggests that the name *Jaga* (which seems to derive from the verb "to fight" -*oku yaka*; "they fight" = *a yaka* or *vayaka*) was originally a name given to these hordes or to their leaders by the African peoples whom they fought and conquered.(4)

175 177 European contacts with the people of the Benguella Highland took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, before the migrations had settled down. Dutch and Portuguese raids took place in 1645, 1650 and 1661, and since fire-arms appear to have been used at that time by the Africans, it seems likely that Umbundu dynasties had them when they came into the region.(5) In 1760 the throwing open of the hinterland to European traders(6) led to greatly increased commercial contact, and this in turn gave rise to wars between the native rulers and the Portuguese. In 1774-6 a war was fought between the Portuguese and their native allies and the kings of Bailundu and Cingolo. Ciyaka and neighbouring kingdoms continued to raid the European garrisons until recent times, and Europeans appear not to have penetrated Ciyaka until almost the turn of the present century.

[021]

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF OVIMBUNDU TRADE

175 439 There are indications that before the end of the eighteenth century the Ovimbundu were becoming, or had become, traders. The slave-trade was formally prohibited in 1836,(7) and subsequently European traders began to move inland in greater numbers in search of ivory, settling especially in Bailundu and Viye. This began a period of great commercial development among the Ovimbundu, the principal commodities being ivory, beeswax, and, in the third quarter of the century, rubber.(8) Trading caravans of the Ovimbundu (under the names *Mambari*, *Libeans*, *Bailundus*, or *Mbundus*) became

(1) See especially Battell, pp.19f. (2) 1921, p.106.
(3) 1925, map facing p.282. (4) Childs, op.cit., pp.185-6. (5) Ibid., p.195.
(6) Entry of European traders to the hinterland had been forbidden by law in 1620, although the law had become largely a dead letter.
(7) Although contraband slave-trade continued until late in the nineteenth century, the slaves being used for the transport of ivory and other goods from the hinterland to the coast.
(8) These were at first one-way agreements, allowing Ovimbundu to trade in many lands, since it was to the advantage of the rulers of these countries. The Ovimbundu are said in fact to have discouraged the tribes to the east from venturing out on their own account. See Livingstone 1857, p.384, Cameron 1877, p.406.

known throughout the territory bounded by the Congo river, the Great Lakes, and the Kalahari desert. Most other Ovimbundu kingdoms fell into line with the trading activities of Bailundu and Viye. By the middle of the century this had resulted in a loose system of alliances and mutual understandings to the effect that the traders and caravans of each kingdom would be permitted to enter or travel through the others. At time these "trade-agreements" seem to have embraced all the Umbundu-speaking peoples, but violations were frequent, especially between Viye and the Ciyaka-Cingola-Citata group. Trade-agreements were also made beyond the Umbundu-speaking area, e.g. with the Mwata Yamvo of the Lunda.(1)

From roughly the turn of the twentieth century the large-scale trading activities of the Ovimbundu declined. Military occupation of Viye and Bailundu took place in 1890, and from that date European traders began to settle in Viye and Bailundu in ever-increasing numbers. In 1902 the Bailundu war occurred, after which the occupation of the whole of Umbundu country was quickly completed. This campaign paralysed trade, which was already suffering because of a great fall in rubber prices. Other factors which hastened the decline of Ovimbundu trading activities(2) include the famine in Ngangela country in 1911, the disappearance of illicit slave-traffic, and, finally, the building of the Benguella Railway (commenced in 1904), which put an end to the porterage and trading caravans of former days.(3)

## LANGUAGE

"Umbundu is usually(4) associated with Ambo, Herero and kindred languages. It would however seem that more comparative study is required to show how real this apparent relationship is: it appears to be especially based on the fact that Umbundu uses prefixial o- with many of its noun classes. In general structure, however, Umbundu shows remarkable similarity in grammar and vocabulary to Luena, Luchazi and other languages of the Ganguella [Ngangela] group.

Features of Umbundu which are worthy of note are:-

i. Presence of nasal vowels before and after 'l', 'h', 'v' and 'w'.

ii. In certain nasal compounds, subtraction occurs, involving the second consonant, but not the nasal, e.g. muntu is realised as omunu.

iii. Compared with the Lunda-Luena languages Umbundu exhibits an unusually large number of defective verbs.

iv. A vowel system of five vowels.

(1) These were at first one-way agreements, allowing Ovimbundu to trade in many lands, since it was to the advantage of the rulers of these countries. The Ovimbundu are said in fact to have discouraged the tribes to the east from venturing out on their own account. See Livingstone 1857, p.384, Cameron 1877, p.406.
(2) For much greater detail concerning the rise and fall of Ovimbundu trade see Childs op.cit., pp.191-215.
(3) Ibid.
(4) Duke 1945, p.101; Guthrie 1948, p.64; Childs 1949, p.8.

regent and incarnation" of the spirits. Sacrifices were made at the royal shrine or *kokoloto* ( "at the skulls" ), where the skulls of past chiefs were kept, in order to:-

(i) control the elements i.e. (to ensure a sufficient supply of rain and avoid the dangers caused by storms; also to control fire by providing a new fire ceremonially kindled[1] from which everyone took his fire.

(ii) to ensure fertility, towards which the royal marriage had great influence. The queen's special province was agriculture and her kitchen was sanctified by human sacrifice to guarantee the national food supply. Ceremonially treated seed was distributed to be mixed with the seed of each granary.

(b) *To represent the country in its external relations,* principally to make trade agreements with other chiefs, or to make war on other peoples in order to get tribute and plunder. The war leader *(Kesongo)* has his own residence entirely separate from that of the king, whom he must not meet face to face except on certain ceremonial occasions.[2] Each king must inaugurate his reign with a war, during which or after which he must ceremonially "eat the old one" *(oku lia ekongo)* - who was usually a specially fattened slave cooked with the flesh of the principal animals commonly eaten.[3]

(c) *To dispense justice.* The chief's court or *olusenje* was the supreme court of the chiefdom. The chief had the final word in any case, but most chiefs acted according to custom.

(d) *To protect himself and the chiefdom,* the chief could use "magic" (?) which might have been accounted witchcraft or murder if practised without authority: e.g. the ritual murder of a pregnant woman, or of the children whose lives were required for building and furnishing the queen's kitchen.

(e) The chief made much use of divination in order to carry out his office. For this purpose he had his own diviner *(citue cosoma)*, who was of the blood royal; but he also consulted diviners of other regions and types.

Succession to chiefship is in the male line,[4] from father to son, elder brother to younger brother or brother's son, or sometimes to one more distantly related. The election is made by the councillors whose duty it is (?), ordinarily before the old chief's death is announced. These same councillors may depose an unpopular chief, and there have been many such depositions. This "democratic" tendency of the Ovimbundu has been noted by most writers. Childs points out that it is attested by the fact that a chief (formerly as well as today) works in his own fields, and by folk-tales which give incidental and intimate pictures of petty details in the lives of the chiefs†

(1) See above, p.26.
(2) In Bailundu he, with certain other officials, was of the stock of slaves of the state *(ovindili viosoma)*.
(3) Childs, p.21. Many early writers refer to the cannibalism of the "Jagas" or "Imbangalas" who are thought to have been the Ovimbundu chiefs. (See above, p.8, and also Lacerda and Ravenstein, quoted by Childs, pp.17ff.)
(4) But *inheritance* is said to follow a different line among chiefs from among commoners; possibly inheritance is also in the paternal line. See Childs p.18.

† See footnote 1, p. 31

175 that the Church participated actively (T. Lewis, The Old Kingdom of Kongo, *Geog. Journ.*, 1908, pp. 598–600).

Political influence of the Portuguese, working often through the agency of Jesuit priests, led to factions within the Congo Empire, and the resulting disturbances caused movements of peoples that affected the whole of northern Angola and the population of the Benguela Highlands.

Portuguese penetration of the hinterland of Angola, especially from Loanda to Bihé, was concerned with attempts to subjugate native tribes, the establishment of trading posts, and the encouragement of the slave trade (S. Marquardsen, Angola, 1928, pp. 6–10).

439 721 The value of the Portuguese as allies of Umbundu caravans from Bihé lay in their ability to supply guns and powder to their native henchmen, who gave something more than military service in return. In response to Portuguese demand for slaves and ivory, Umbundu caravans made long journeys into the Congo basin, Rhodesia, south and southwest Angola, and possibly across Africa to lakes Tanganyika and Nyasa. The arms supplied in exchange for ivory and slaves must have helped the Ovimbundu in all their predatory excursions.

648 Thus the Ovimbundu were, in the early centuries of contact with the Portuguese, invaders encouraged in the building up of their tribal life and resources. Never were the Portuguese strong enough completely to subjugate northern Angola. Relationships with natives, especially the Bihéan section of the Ovimbundu, were directed toward alliances on a commercial basis. The political result of this was a combination of the Portuguese and the stronger tribes for the exploitation of the weaker.

167 177 The historical ethnology of the southwest Congo is so complex that the elements are difficult to disentangle. The number of tribes concerned is great, and their movements are not easy to follow; but a gradual extension of people from the Congo in a southwesterly direction through Lunda to the Benguela Highlands (1600–1800) seems to be the summation of all the conflict. I regard the Ovimbundu as the most southerly branch of these mass movements, during which they received a discipline that enabled them to make their home in central Angola, despite opposition from the Portuguese and earlier arrivals.

114 For these conclusions reliance has been placed on the extensive field work and historical analyses of E. Torday and T. A. Joyce, whose "Notes on the Ethnography of the Bambala" (*J.R.A.I.*, XXXV, pp. 398–426) have proved of particular value in this connection.

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13



686 actually paid to redeem his brother and sister who were sold to pay the debts of his maternal uncle. Officialdom is one thing and actual [177] practice is another. Ngonga is right when he says that people appeal to the native law as laid down by the chief or king. If they are not satisfied they pretend a great respect for Portuguese law and therefore go to the Administrador.

## WARFARE AND SLAVERY

648 726 The Ovimbundu have been for centuries an organized people possessed of a well-developed language, a legal system, and complex social organization. In trade and travel too, the Ovimbundu have been in the vanguard of African tribes. These reasons, in conjunction with the fact of numerical superiority and early contact with the Portuguese, would account for the success of the Ovimbundu in warfare. The defensive federations existing between the ten or twelve main political units, whereby they did not habitually war on each other, helped to assure success. Should the eldest son of a king's [693] principal wife be thought unsuitable as successor, a competent son of the deceased king was elected by a council of village chiefs.

411 There is no evidence that the Ovimbundu poisoned their weapons, neither do they do so today. The Ovimbundu do not use a shield at the present time, neither is it certain that they had shields in former times. A skin-covered powder-box was carried in the king's train when on the warpath.

718 Signaling-drums were about two feet long. They were made from a cylinder of wood over the ends of which skin was stretched. Signaling, which was accomplished by drumming with the palms of the hands, was the task of boys who resided in the king's compound, except when they accompanied him to war or on a trading journey. There was no system of smoke signaling. The iron war gong was named *ongonge*, but the instrument is nowadays tapped by the assistant of a medicine-man during his performance. In former times the gong was struck in the night to give assurance that the enemy was not in sight.

726 In war the oldest son of a king or of a chief went ahead of the war party accompanied by a few men who wore red leaves on their foreheads.

721 Intertribal jealousies, raiding for cattle and slaves, also reprisals for interference with caravan trade, were the chief causes of conflict with surrounding peoples. There was undoubtedly some internal warfare within the confederacy. The Ovimbundu of Elende, Bail-

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13



undu, and Ngalangi are said to have had conflicts. In time past, as at the present day, a king reigned over territory which was extensive but definitely delimited for purposes of administration. Encroachment of one king on the rights of taxation and administration of another led to raids and reprisals. Village chiefs collected taxes in the form of agricultural produce and gave these to the king, who personally visited a village from which payments had not been made. A folklore story begins, "The people had not paid taxes so the king came to the village and told them a parable."

A king, if young, accompanied his people on the warpath. There was, however, a permanent leader named *kesongo*, a derivative from *songola* ("to lead"). The declaration of war, likewise the tactics, were discussed by a council of *olosekulu* ("village chiefs") in the *ombala* ("capital") where the king had, and still has, a royal compound. If war had been conducted among sections of the Ovimbundu, the defeated people had to pay taxes and tribute; moreover, their women and cattle were taken. In event of a successful war against the Vachokue there was plundering of cattle and women, but it was not found practicable to exact periodical payments from the enemy.

The subject of warfare is intimately related to that of slavery. There was until very recent times a domestic slavery which followed from the inability of a person to pay his debts. In connection with this reduction of free persons to a condition of slavery there are several points of exceptional interest. The debtor himself is not taken as a slave, neither are his wife or children. The correct procedure is a sale of his sister's children; but more frequently the children themselves are taken by the creditor. "The debtor's sister will say nothing because this is the law of the Ovimbundu." If payment of the debt is made later, the children are set free. Usually the word pawning is used by ethnologists to describe this proceeding.

Further consideration of Ngonga's payment to his mother's brother clarifies the facts of domestic slavery. "I paid for them, I took their place," said my interpreter. The payment for the return of these two children was two oxen. The girl, who was ten years of age when she was taken to pay the debt, was returned to her people when she was a woman with three children. Ngonga's brother was not actually taken from his home. He was made to pay his mother's brother's debt by working for the creditor. In general, these domestic slaves were not ill treated, though their rights were limited. The position of slaves taken from a hostile

[1874 - 1911]

## THE OVIMBUNDU UNDER TWO SOVEREIGNTIES

It was then the father who normally exercised authority over a boy, and on the father's death a child or youth would join the household of a father's brother. Yet the right of a sister's son to the inheritance of the movable property and to grants from his mother's brother was counterbalanced by the latter's right to sell his uterine nephew into slavery, a fate from which the father could save his son by ransoming him, in which case the mother's brother would no longer have this right.[86] In this society, the mother's brother—sister's son relationship was fundamentally an economic one, in which the sister's son received assistance in the trade and inherited his uncle's gains in this trade, but could himself be transformed into a source of capital.

I now summarize the evidence on Umbundu social control and its relation with the trading economy. It is clear that the Ovimbundu belonged to the number of those African societies with pyramidal[87] political systems and formal codes and courts of law, even though there exists uncertainty as to the relative power of the kingdoms and the sub-chiefdoms. Social control also operated through the kinship system, authority at the village level being in the hands of the head of the patrilineal group backed by the public opinion expressed in the men's house, and the dispersed matrilineal groups having sanctions in the right of sale of a sister's son and in the accusations of sorcery brought against those who failed to use wealth to aid their relatives. For the caravan trade to have attained the importance it did there must also have existed something of a *pax Umbundica* stimulated by the existence of such ties as that between *tjisoko* partners and the 'international' hospitality shown to diviners, hunters, and smiths. Evidence of this *pax Umbundica* is provided by the organization of caravans, and by the establishment of marriage ties between persons in different kingdoms, and between different royal houses.[88] However, warfare was not unknown between the different

[86] Childs, p. 44, and my informants.

[87] See Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, Introduction to *African Political Systems*.

[88] Hastings (p. 1) notes a marriage between the daughter of a king of Bie and Ekwikwi, king of Bailundo (1876–93). Childs (p. 171) notes that Kalukuluma, king of Ndulu, was a sister's son of a king of Bailundo.

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
FP13 Mbundu FP13



kingdoms of the Ovimbundu, though more frequently perhaps it was made against the non-Umbundu peoples.[89]

The question of the influence of the trade provides interesting opportunities for comparison. The Ovimbundu were the southernmost of the peoples who in the nineteenth century participated in the trade between the Europeans of the West African coast and the peoples of the interior.[90] In some ways the Ovimbundu seem to have been less influenced by it than were some of the peoples further north. The Ovimbundu did not develop genuine patterns of urban life as in Dahomey or Benin.[91]

Three explanations can be offered for the relative failure of associational groups and urban society to develop. Umbundu crafts were much inferior to those found along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea; there was no indigenous weaving industry, for instance, and the goods which the caravans carried to the interior were all of European or American origin, cloths, guns, and rum.[92] For these goods the Ovimbundu were dependent on the Portuguese settled at the coast or in the Highland and this meant that the Ovimbundu were far from economic autonomy. Again the trade had a relatively short time span—the real boom period lasted only from 1886 to 1900, and earlier on in the 1840's when the beeswax, ivory, and slave trade was flourishing, the Ovimbundu had plenty of time for warfare.

It would, however, be a grave mistake to think that trade had only a marginal influence on Umbundu society. It has been suggested that the form of the double-descent system owes its origin to the necessity to isolate economic relations from other social fields. In the sphere of ritual, there are some remarkable copies of European practices—for instance the holding of a feast in honour of the ancestors at Christmas-time.[93] Many ritual concepts are related to the explanation of business

[89] For information on Umbundu warfare see Magyar, pp. 277–80 and Serpa Pinto, pp. 177–9.

[90] See Balandier, *Sociologie Actuelle de l'Afrique Noire*, Paris, 1955, for a discussion of social change in other areas which had experienced a trade of a similar sort.

[91] For Dahomey see M. J. Herskovits, *Dahomey*, New York, 1938. For Benin see R. Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom* (Ethnographic Survey of Africa), London, 1957.

[92] Childs, p. 206.

[93] Informants.